

PLANNING & DEVELOPMENT SERVICES DEPARTMENT REPORT

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DATE: June 8, 2000

TO: Orange County Zoning Administrator

FROM: Current Planning Services Division

SUBJECT: Public Hearing on Planning Application PA00-0053

PROPOSAL: Site Plan for development of a church with an alternative development standard for a 62-foot high steeple rather than the 35-foot district height limit.

LOCATION: 26176 Antonio Parkway, Las Flores - 5th Supervisorial District

APPLICANT: Church of Jesus Christ Latter Day Saints - Property Owner
Ms. Kathy Oswalt, Gary W. Miller, Architect & Associates –Authorized Agent

STAFF CONTACT: William Melton, Project Manager
Phone: (714) 834-2541 FAX: (714) 834-4652

SYNOPSIS: Site Planning staff recommends Zoning Administrator approval, subject to findings and conditions of approval.

BACKGROUND:

This Site Development Permit is proposed for the construction of a church facility that includes a 16,558 square foot church containing a chapel, cultural hall, Sunday school rooms and related administrative offices and services used for Sunday worship, week night youth and social events. No children's day care is proposed or intended. There is also a separate 14 feet by 12 feet storage building for maintenance equipment. The project site is located on Lot 1 of Tract 15046 within Planning Area 4 of the Las Flores Planned Community. Planning Area 4 is designated as "Residential". Community facilities such as churches are permitted within the residential districts; however, in 1994 the property ownership received approval of an Area Plan amendment that further designated the project site as a potential "Church" site. The addition of a community facility within Planning Area 4 was deemed appropriate for the community and the location is consistent with the clustering of services in the Antonio / Oso Parkway intersection area.

Community Facility uses are subject to the district regulations of the Las Flores Planned Community Program Text. The purpose of these regulations is to provide for those nonresidential uses which are customarily established within a community in order to provide residents and employees with necessary community support services. Typical community facilities to be established within Las Flores Planned Community include public utilities, public safety buildings, educational facilities, churches, child care and recreation facilities. Churches are a principal permitted use that is subject to the approval of a site plan. A site plan may be used to establish alternative development standards for a project; however, the Zoning Administrator becomes the decision-maker for such applications. Therefore, this application is presented to the Zoning Administrator for approval of the Site

Development Permit to allow the construction of a church and related ancillary improvements, including the request for alternative development standards for a single, non-illuminated steeple that exceeds the district height limit of 35 feet.

SURROUNDING LAND USE:

The project is located within Planning Area 4 of the Las Flores Planned Community, and all surrounding uses are also located within the Las Flores Planned Community. The site is designated as a potential church site within Area Plan AP94-03, approved by the O.C. Planning Commission on November 8, 1994. The building site is situated on the southeast corner at the intersection of Oso Parkway and Antonio Parkway.

Direction	Planning Area	Land Use Designation	Existing Land Use
Project Site	4	Residential / Church	Vacant
North	3	Residential / School	Existing School Site with Residential Above
South	12	Open Space	Existing Open Space
East	4	Residential	Existing Residential
West	8	Neighborhood Center Commercial	Existing Retail Commercial and Service Station uses and Santa Margarita Water District Offices

REFERRAL FOR COMMENT AND PUBLIC NOTICE:

A Notice of Hearing was mailed to all owners of record within 300 feet of the subject site. Additionally, a notice was posted at the site, at the 300 N. Flower Building and as required by established public hearing posting procedures. A copy of the planning application and a copy of the proposed site plan were distributed for review and comment to eight (8) County Divisions.

As of the writing of this staff report, no comments raising issues with the project have been received from other County divisions by staff.

CEQA COMPLIANCE:

The proposed project is covered by Final EIR 506, previously certified on 12/5/90 and by Addendum PA000053. Prior to project approval, the decision-maker must assert that this EIR, together with Addendum PA000053, are adequate to satisfy the requirements of CEQA for the proposed project.

DISCUSSION/ANALYSIS:

This Site Development Permit is proposed for the construction of a church facility that includes a 16,558 square foot church containing a chapel, cultural hall, Sunday school rooms and related administrative offices and services used for Sunday worship, week night youth and social events. No children's day care is proposed or intended. There is also a separate 14 feet by 12 feet storage building for maintenance equipment.

The site plan includes a single story church building with 16,558 total square feet. The total building site is 6.385 acres on the immediate southeast corner of the intersection of Antonio and Oso Parkways. The site plan proposes improvement to approximately one-half of the building site, leaving the southern portion of the building site fallow for future consideration and development. A secondary access driveway is proposed through the fallow portion along the toe of the slope that provides direct access to Antonio Parkway via Deerpath, a short cul-de-sac street south of Oso Parkway. The primary building is approximately 28 feet tall (27'4"). A 61 feet 11 inch tall steeple is proposed at the western end of the building. The steeple is approximately 34 feet taller than the single story building. However, the steeple is eight feet wide at its base, narrowing as it rises, and is less than 1% of the total roof area proposed for the building. No bells, chimes or other audible sounds are proposed for the steeple, nor is there any proposed illumination. However, the steeple height is proposed as an alternative development standard within the Site Development Permit because it exceeds the district height limit of 35 feet. In order to approve an alternative development standard, the applicant must provide justification that the alternative development standard will result in an equal or better project in terms of adverse impacts to the immediate and surrounding community and a Finding to this effect must be made by the decision-maker.

The applicant and staff believe that the finding for the alternative development standard can be made based upon the following items presented by the applicant. Steeples have long been associated with religious architecture. Towers were used to identify the building as a place of worship and as a reference point for the community. The proposed building is designed to recall the traditional images and is essential to the idea of traditional western worship. Another aspect for the steeple is that the only signage proposed for the site is a 4 feet 6 inch wide by 2 feet 5 inch high building mounted sign. No monument signage is proposed at the street, and no illuminated signage is proposed at any location on the site. Thus, the tower serves to identify the church in a manner other than a sign.

The attached letter of justification includes examples of traditional western religious architecture. In each of the examples, the steeple height, as measured from the ridge of the building is slightly more than the ridge height of the building. The proposed church has a ridgeline of 27 feet 4 inches and the top of the steeple is 61 feet 11 inches – a 34 feet difference in height. The 34-foot steeple height is 7 feet higher than the height of the proposed one story building. The proposed steeple appears to be in proportion to the historical examples and with the proposed building scale. The windows within the steeple and column elements are in close proportion to the windows on the building.

The only adverse impact that may be raised with respect to the steeple height might be homeowner view. However, the tower will not be illuminated in any way; and, the top of the church building is 6 feet lower than the building pad elevations of adjacent homes and 12 feet lower than the ground floor eye level. The top of the steeple is approximately at the same height as the rooftops of the homes. Considering the fact that the widest profile of the steeple is only 8 feet at its base, narrowing as it rises, and is more than 340 feet away from the nearest home, it is highly unlikely to obstruct a homeowners view.

The exterior elevations of the building include the use of muted red brick and stone together with a gable roof design to accent the entries and other features. A metal fascia and soffit surround the roofline and integrate the transition from the roof material to the brick building façade. The roof material is a composition shingle. Four ground mounted mechanical enclosures adjacent to the building provide screening for the mechanical equipment while eliminating any roof mounted equipment. The freestanding maintenance storage building is 10 feet 6 inches tall and is comprised of matching building materials.

Parking is provided within the project site in compliance with the off-street parking regulations of the Orange County Zoning Code. The church proposes 254 seats and an additional 4,036 square feet of open seating area for special occasion gatherings. The O.C. Zoning Code requires parking for churches provide 1 parking space for each 3 fixed seats and 1 space for each 35 square feet of additional seating area where there are no fixed seats. Thus, the site must provide a total of 200 off-street parking spaces to meet the code requirements. The proposed site plan provides a total of 230 parking spaces, exceeding the minimum required number of spaces. The excess parking spaces are currently located outside of 300 feet to the entry of the church, however, the design is preferable and allows for future integration with development of the fallow portion of the building site in the future.

A landscape plan is included within the proposed plans and integrates into the existing landscaping within the community. It proposes an additional layer of street trees, in addition to the existing street trees that are already in place along both Antonio and Oso Parkway. In addition, trees, shrubs and groundcover are proposed throughout the parking lot areas and around the perimeter of the building. The existing slope behind the site that ascends to the adjacent residential lots contains existing hydroseed groundcover planting that is proposed to remain. A condition of approval has been included that will require the applicant to prepare and submit a final landscape plan prior to issuance of grading permits.

The location of the trash enclosure, adjacent to the ascending slope on the east portion of the site, poses the need to require overhead screening to prevent views into the trash bins from above. The applicant will accept a condition to require a trellis cover or additional screen trees to provide the necessary screening. Currently the condition of approval included in Appendix B provides for this option, however, the Zoning Administrator may prescribe the exact method at the public hearing, or leave the condition as written and delegate the final determination to the Manager, Current Planning Services Division.

Grading operations for the construction of the church building and site improvements includes the relocation of approximately 10,000 cubic yards of earth. It is proposed to have a balanced site thus there should be no import or export. The proposed building pad is at 595 feet and the grade immediately south is also 595. Thus, the site is nearly level with grade on the south side and as the grade falls toward the west and north, the building pad relative to the native grade rises approximately 5 feet to create a level pad. There is not a significant increase in the finish grade, but rather the consequence of creating a level pad on a sloping site and to ensure proper drainage conveyance.

The design of the proposed church site is consistent with the development standards of the Las Flores Planned Community and the O. C. Zoning Code, with the exception of the proposed steeple height. However, staff is of the opinion that the finding for support of the alternative development standard has been made, as presented within this report. Therefore, staff recommends Zoning Administrator approval of the proposed planning application, including the proposed alternative development standard for the proposed steeple height.

RECOMMENDED ACTION:

Current Planning Services Division recommends the Zoning Administrator:

- a. Receive staff presentation and public testimony as appropriate; and,

- b. Approve Planning Application PA 00-0053 for the development of the church with an alternative development standard for the height of the steeple at 61 feet 11 inches, subject to the attached Findings and Conditions of Approval.

Respectfully submitted

C. M. Shoemaker, Chief
CPSD/Site Planning Section

CB: Folder Document1

ATTACHMENTS:

- Appendix A. Recommended Findings
- Appendix B. Recommended Conditions of Approval

EXHIBITS:

- 1. Applicant's Letter of Explanation/Justification
- 2. Environmental Documentation
- 3. Project Plans